

Give Your Child Information that is Age-Appropriate.

Everyday, families in our communities face unemployment, traffic accidents, and crime. These events can be very scary and upsetting for children. Even though such events may be common, these “everyday crises” are very stressful. Don’t let your child watch repeated images of these situations or other violent or sad events on TV. Give an event some context—that is, explain what you know about the situation in your own words and from your point of view. Remember to be calm and talk at the child’s level. Tell your child only as much as you think she can really understand. Short answers may be better.


Try to answer your child’s questions truthfully, but in words she knows and understands. It’s OK to say, “I don’t know.”



AFFIRMATION

**No matter how long
the night, the day is
sure to come.**

~ Congo Proverb



If you need some help figuring out what to say to your child, or how to talk to her about a crisis in words she can understand, ask a health care provider, school counselor, or mental health professional, or check out the ***Just for Parents*** section of this book for other resources. This section also gives some tips on how to help your child handle a major crisis.

Why are these activities important?

It's hard for adults to deal with some of the things they see on TV and in magazines and newspapers, especially things that are painful or violent. It's even harder for children to understand what they're seeing. These activities will help your child to:

- ✓ Understand a recent crisis or event
- ✓ Learn how the crisis changes the world around her
- ✓ Talk about the crisis in her own words
- ✓ Hope for the future
- ✓ Feel helpful
- ✓ Know how you feel about what's happened
- ✓ Model her actions and reactions after your actions

Activity 1: I'm just a kid

What you need

- ✓ Poem on page 34

This activity reminds your child that it's OK just to be a child. It gives you a way to tell your child that you don't expect her to act like an adult, or to handle things that adults do.

In hard times, many children think that the event is their fault—that it happened because of something they did wrong or because of something they didn't do. Your child may want to save you and your family from danger or harm. But, she can't keep things from happening to her family. Her main job is just growing up. The poem tells her that she's not supposed to take care of everybody; she just has to be herself.

1. Read the poem on page 34 with your child.
2. Use these questions to talk about the poem:
 - ✓ What does she think about the poem, and how does it make her feel?
 - ✓ What does she like best about being a kid?
 - ✓ What would she like to be or do in the future?
3. Remind your child (and yourself) that being “just a kid” is hard enough. Tell her she should leave the other worries and tasks to adults.



I'M JUST A KID

*By Betty J. Ford**

*I'm just a kid you know
I can have fun everyday
I can enjoy myself and play
Without a care in the world.*

*I'm just a kid you know
I can enjoy hot dogs, puppy dogs,
peanut butter and butterflies.
I can learn anything and everything
I am taught - good and bad.
I can experience new adventures
And ask lots of questions
Over and over again.*

*I'm just a kid you see
I can pretend to be
A pirate, a teacher,
A baker or even a preacher.
But one day pretending will be over
And I will become what I have learned
So teach me well and remember*

I AM THE FUTURE

*With the potential to be leader
Of this Nation one day.*

But right now - I'm just a kid!

**Betty J. Ford is a musician, poet, member of NBCDI and Secretary of her local NAACP Chapter. This poem was inspired by children in an after-school program where she was a volunteer teacher helping children to memorize and recite poetry.*

Activity 2: A picture is worth a thousand words

Through this activity, your child can learn that, even in every day events, she can still do things to help, no matter how young or old she is. Knowing that she is not helpless can give your child hope during troubled times. Talk to your child about the kinds of things children can do to help others. Make sure to point out the things that are better for adults to do.

1. Take a large piece of construction paper or tear out the blank sheet provided on pages 37-38 and fold it in half.
2. Cut out pictures or articles from the newspaper or magazines that show hard times that happen to people every day. You may want to include topics like homelessness, pollution, unemployment, military personnel being away from their families, or crime in the community.
3. Explain what is happening in each picture in words that your child can understand. Use words she knows to describe the event.
4. Let your child pick one picture to glue on the bottom inside half of the folded paper.
5. Ask your child how she thinks she can help the people in that situation. Some ways to help include:
 - ✓ Volunteer as a family to clean up part of your street or a local park
 - ✓ Collect nickels to send to a local shelter
 - ✓ Send a can of food, toothbrush, or other item to a local food kitchen

What you need

- ✓ Scissors
- ✓ Glue
- ✓ Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- ✓ Construction paper or poster board

REMEMBER

You can help your child come up with the different ways she can help by **brainstorming**—writing down all the words that come to mind about a certain topic. Brainstorm helpful actions with your child and write down all the words you think of to describe these actions. Then, have your child use one or more of those words in making her picture of the future.



- ✓ Write letters or cards to military personnel with good wishes or messages to cheer people up
- ✓ Have a car wash or bake sale to raise money for a local charity
- ✓ Pray together

6. Ask your child to think about how a good future might look. For example:
 - ✓ People finding jobs
 - ✓ Everyone getting enough to eat
 - ✓ Families being together
7. Fold the construction paper down to cover the picture. Have your child draw a new picture on the paper to show how things might change in the future, or when the crisis is over.
8. Ask your child to tell you about her picture. Let her tell you why she sees the future that way. Open up the paper to look at the actual event, and then close the paper to show your child's picture of a better world.



NOTE TO PARENTS

Some older children may pick out pictures or images that are very violent or graphic. These images could be scary for younger children who are also doing the activity. You may want to do this activity with one child at a time, so that you can talk about topics that each child thinks are important, using words and pictures that are appropriate for his or her age.

Activity 2: A picture is worth a thousand words

Activity 3: What do my parents think?

This is a good activity for **older** children. Your thoughts and feelings can make a difference in what your child thinks and feels. Even though many children say they don't want help from their parents, they really do need your help and guidance. If your child knows what you believe in, she'll know her reactions and feelings are OK. For example, if your child hears you talking about an event, like a war or a new law, she'll feel better about forming her own opinions about the event. Your child will learn how you think and feel about important things by listening to you talk, which can help her to make her own opinions.

1. Look over newspapers and magazines with your child that report on an everyday event or topic that can cause stress, such as unemployment, homelessness, or hunger, or visit Web sites that post these kinds of reports. You can also go to the public library to get these items.
2. Talk about what's shown in the pictures. Tell your child what you know about the event, and how you feel about it.
3. Read parts of the articles out loud and explain them in words your child can understand. Ask your child to repeat what happened so you can find out how much she understood.
4. Ask your child what she thinks should happen next. Suggest some positive outcomes to the events. Have your child think of some positive outcomes. Write down these outcomes and keep them in a special place.

What you need

- ✓ Newspapers or magazines



NOTE TO PARENTS

Sharing your values and beliefs helps your child learn about the world around her. Respecting the values and opinions of others is also important. Make sure your child knows that even if someone feels differently than you do about something, they still have the right to their opinions and beliefs. You may want to point out why you disagree or how your beliefs are different. But, be sure that your child knows that having an opinion is OK, even if it's a different opinion.

